

### What's it all about ?

This document aims to support members to:

- gain a little understanding of what stress is.
- recognise some of the signs and symptoms of stress.
- provide guidance on how to start to address the issue of work-related stress.
- signpost them to other resources which may provide help and support.

### What is Stress ?

Stress is not a specific medical condition, but a term used to describe the physiological impacts experienced by an individual responding or reacting to a situation or circumstances they are experiencing.

It occurs when the brain detects sensory changes or behaviours which may have previously been linked to negative experience known as a “**Stressor**”



Responding to the **Stressor**, a part of the brain called the **Hypothalamus**, stimulates the body to produce two hormones called **Adrenaline** and **Cortisol**.

The release of these hormones triggers the body into a the “**Fight or Flight**” response.

People experience stress for a variety of reasons, with some even finding the short-term effects to be a stimulus. Where the stress response is affecting your life in a negative way or for a prolonged period, then this can be harmful both for your physical and mental wellbeing.

### The impact of Stress on existing Mental Health and other conditions

In the same way we all have physical health, we all have mental health. Many are aware of the statistic that in any one year, 1 in 4 adults experience at least one common mental health problem, with different factors, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation and age, having a potentially disproportionate impact<sup>1</sup>.

For those who are aware of a pre-existing or long-term mental or physical health condition, it may be that this is something that they normally manage extremely well and have made adjustments to their life to adapt to this. However, it can be that other factors causing them to become stressed then affect the management of that condition, exacerbating the effects of that condition.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#References>

### Common signs and symptoms of Stress

The **Stressors** which trigger a **Fight or Flight** response can vary for each individual and not everyone reacts in the same way. However, there is a commonality in the signs and symptoms exhibited by those experiencing stress.

The release of **Adrenaline** and **Cortisol** have a number of physical effects on the body, such as increasing heart rate, increasing blood pressure, it also triggers the release of stored sugars from muscles and organs, resulting in increased blood sugar levels.

The metabolic, digestive and reproductive systems can also be affected, potentially causing changes in menstruation cycles, indigestion or conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Given the role of the **Hypothalamus** in controlling appetite, emotions, libido, sleep, digestion. It is easy to see how it can impact on areas like cognitive function or disruption to the bodies normal sleep routine, with someone sleeping more, suffering disrupted sleep or insomnia with individuals struggling to get to sleep.

Equally, due to the changes in blood sugars or a need to simulate a positive feeling. Those experiencing stress can often find that they are drawn towards food with high calorie counts, to replenish reserves and nutrients, this is where you may have heard the terms “Stress eating” or “Seeking comfort food”.

Whilst there may be no harm with a little of something in moderation, with it meeting the body’s immediate energy requirements and may potentially be linked to previous experiences that the brain recalls as positive, triggering a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment, reducing the negative feelings of being “stressed”.

There is a risk an individual could potentially adapt coping mechanisms that may have a negative impact on their overall wellbeing, for example excessive consumption of food or alcohol over a long period or seeking other stimuluses such as online gambling, or other activities likely to elicit the body to produce an endorphin release.

#### Physical

- chest pain / aching
- increased heart rate
- headaches or dizziness
- fatigue or tiredness
- muscle tension or pain
- stomach problems and upsets
- changes to menstruation cycles
- reduced immune system

#### Behavioural

- struggling to concentration
- difficulty with making decisions
- disrupted sleep patterns
- changes in diet or eating habits
- changes effecting relationships

#### Emotional

- tearful and upset
- constantly worrying or dread
- anxious or overwhelmed
- irritable and / or impatient
- depressed or lacking motivation

If you feel you are being affected by stress, it is important you seek medical advice and to try and address the issues that are causing the body to react and produce a stress response as soon as possible.



## What is Work-related Stress?

Whilst an individual's personal life might produce **Stressors**. Given the amount of time spent within the working environment, it is highly likely that events at work could also produce **Stressors** or potentially exacerbate the issues within an individual's personal life, and therefore, both would be considered Work-related Stress.

According to the 2020 UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) during 2019/20 there were

**828,000**

Workers suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing)

Accounting for

**51%**

of the new and long-standing cases of work-related ill health

In the working environment, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has defined stress as.

***“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”***

### “The Management Standards”

- **Demands** - this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** - how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- **Support** - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **Relationships** - this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- **Change** - how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

[www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm)

In an effort to help **employers** meet their **legal** responsibilities and **“duty of care”**, the HSE has identified the six main areas or potential stressors which could lead to someone experiencing work-related stress if the risks are not managed correctly. These are known as the **Management Standards**.

By breaking down the issues into these areas, it is possible to focus on exactly what it is that is contributing to or potentially causing you to suffer from stress.

Be that due to excessive or unmanageable workloads, issues with unacceptable behaviour, feeling bullied or harassed or the impacts of organisational change.

## Guidance for members on addressing Work-related Stressors

### What should my Employer be doing about Work-related Stress?

**Employers** have a moral and legal **duty of care** to ensure that they protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees both physically and psychologically.

*“It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees”<sup>2</sup>*

Employers are required to identify the risks to the health and safety of their employees and others who may be affected by the business or work. Having identified the risk and hazards, they must then put in place, so far as is reasonably practical, such measures needed to avoid or reduce and control them.

In relation to assessing the risk of **Stress at Work**, an employer should follow the **“Management Standards”** to undertake an assessment of the risks posed to the workforce and others.

As part of a good people management strategy, stress risk assessments should be undertaken at all levels of an organisation, looking first at the likelihood of such issues as high or excessive workloads and the potential risk to the business of individuals becoming overwhelmed developing effective workload modelling and management tools to seek to control and reduce the risks.

Having managed and mitigated the risks for as many as possible, **once an employer is aware** of any individual(s) experiencing issues, they are required to take further steps to address the risk and protect that employee from further harm.

### Why are people being told to become more “Resilient” ?

When used for the purpose of helping employees to develop short-term strategies, to help them when responding to the likelihood of a distressing or traumatic situation, “Resilience Training” can be a useful tool in helping individuals who experience those type of situations, when combined with a wider programme of proactive pastoral care and monitoring.

However, in recent years, Employers have slowly been seeking to change perceptions in relation to who is responsible for managing the risks of health and safety.

Shifting the focus away from the organisation’s responsibility to meet its **duty of care** to manage health and safety in the workplace. Instead focusing it towards effectively blaming employees when something goes wrong.

As a result, more are being told that they should “become more resilient” or that it is their personal life which has caused the issue, or they should be able to cope with the pressures of work.

The shift toward, providing staff with training to accept and cope with the stress caused by increased workloads, unacceptable behaviours or other demands and stressors, is a polar opposite to any other area of effective management of health and safety.

No organisation would dare attempt to tell employees they need to become more resilient to being exposed to harmful substances such as Acid or Ionising Radiation. Nor should they seek to do so in regard to Work-related stress.

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<sup>2</sup> S.2(1) Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 [1974 c.37]

## Guidance for members on addressing Work-related Stressors

### What can I do ?

#### It is okay not to be okay!

Now you know more about the causes of symptoms of stress. You may recognise them in yourself or a colleague. Your employer owes you a duty of care!

It does not have to stay that way. Here are some steps you can take to start to get help

1

If you feel you are being affected by stress, it is important you **seek medical advice** and to try and address the issues that are causing the body to react and produce a stress response as soon as possible.



2

**Report** any stress related symptoms or sickness absence via your employer's Health and Safety accident / Incident reporting process.  
*(If you do not have access to this due to being off work, ask your manager or another colleague to report it on your behalf.)*

3

Having told your manager that there is a problem, we would encourage you to follow it up in writing.

#### **Request an individual stress risk assessment.**

Remember, once your employer is **aware** there is an issue, they have a **duty of care** to take further steps to address the risk to your health and well-being.

*(Your employer may have a specific form for this. There is also a form at the end of this document, you can use it as a guide or where your employer does not have one.)*

4

#### **Make contact with your local Napo Representative.**

In addition to the resource at the end of this guide, your local Napo rep may be able to help you with the steps above and with other information relevant to your employer.

They can also discuss what other steps can be taken. You may be part of a wider issue that will help the branch take the issue forward collectively.

#### **Your work shouldn't make you sick! - Don't let it!**

**If you don't tell your employer, then how will they know there is a problem?**

## Guidance for members on addressing Work-related Stressors

### Protect yourself and others

Following steps above, can **help** protect **you, your colleagues** and **your manager**, providing them with the evidence they need to ask for the resource to fix the problem.

The issues within the workplace causing you to be stressed may not always be linked to just one individual but can equally be effecting others. Work-related stress is a collective issue.

Another important reason, in the context of Probation / Family Court work, that is vital, especially in light commentary expressed in Corners Reports, is to ensure that if there were any issue with missed deadlines or tasks not completed, you can evidence that you had raised your concerns with your employer.

Time and again there have been incidents where a member's actions have been questioned and it is not enough to say much later that your workload was too high or that you were experiencing work related stress, you need to have brought this to the attention of your employer at the time.

### Guidance for Members with Management Responsibilities

For those members whose roles' include management responsibilities, it can sometimes feel like you are caught in the middle of a tricky situation, trying to tackle issues like high workloads and other causes of work-related stress effecting the team.

Members with management responsibilities, have shared with Napo's national Officers and Officials, how they often feel a responsibility for the issues their teams are experiencing with the burden 'sitting with them', whilst having little power or access to resource to help resolve it.

Hopefully the steps below will provide some **help** and **guidance**. Whilst your employer have a duty to provide you with assistance to undertake your role, you can also speak to your local rep or branch about accessing any Napo support forums related to your role.

1

First and foremost, it is important for you to remember that the four steps mentioned above also apply directly to you.

Even more importantly, it does your team no good if you do not take steps to protect yourself and can actually have a neqative impact on the team as a result.



2

If you think a member of your team may be showing the signs and symptoms of someone stressed talk to them about it.

You may be engaging with them at an early stage. Consider sharing this guide with them, and signpost them to any other resources within your organisation.

If they have not already done so

- **Encourage** them, to seek medical advice
- **Support** them, to complete an accident report
- **Reassure** and work with them to complete a stress risk assessment

### Guidance for Members with Management Responsibilities (Continued)

3

**Implement** the **risk control measures** that were identified as part of undertaking the stress risk assessment.

**Gather** more **information** about how widespread the issues are, look at your team's absence data for early warning signs, consider using a team risk assessment to help you with this. Stress is not always an individual issue.

**Raise** the issues within your area of supervision with your manager and seek both support and the resources to resolve the issues.

Where the stressor(s) are not related to relationship factors, raise the issue at management team meetings and **share** the information gathered about how widespread the issues are.

This could also help other teams or provider further evidence to **support** your manager to escalated the issue and request additional resources

4

#### **Liaise with your Local Napo Reps and Health & Safety Reps.**

They are able to progress and raise issues at local management or health and safety meetings and if required, escalate to a regional or national level.

Sometimes senior management can look at averaged workloads or resourcing models, taking a statistical median view across a whole workforce, this generalistic approach does not identify specific complexities in locations, teams or work activities (i.e. high risk cases).

You may be able to assist the Reps with any research needed such as,

- appropriately anonymised information relating to any workload measurement tools used by your employer. Highlighting the highest levels and the length of time above agreed baselines, or give examples of excessive workloads and the steps already tried that have failed to resolve the issues.
- being able to balance that view with information about vacancies and extremes of workloads along with the tasks and additional work not properly accounted for in those resourcing models and workload measurement tools.

## Guidance for members on addressing Work-related Stressors

### Additional Sources of advice and help

#### NHS Resources

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/stress/>

**Every Mind Matters**     <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>

**Samaritans**                 <https://www.samaritans.org>

The Samaritans volunteers respond to around 10,000 calls for help every day, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They are there for anyone who's struggling to cope, who needs someone to listen without judgement or pressure. Samaritans is not only for the moment of crisis, but also give people ways to cope to take action to prevent the crisis.

**Call** :116 123. (24/7/365) or **Email**: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (Response time 24 Hrs)

**Mind**                             <https://www.mind.org.uk>

**Mind Cymru**                 <https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru>

Mind Cymru, yr elusen iechyd meddwl

**MindWise**                     <https://www.mindwisenv.org>

**LGBT Foundation**         <https://lgbt.foundation>

**Workstress**                 <http://www.workstress.net>

The UK National Work Stress Network is a voluntary organisation that campaigns to secure proper recognition of the damage caused by work-stress and to prevent work-related stress. They have a selection of help and information of available via their website.

**BeGambleAware®**         <https://www.begambleaware.org>

Administered and funded by an independent charity GambleAware®, whose mission is to keep people safe from gambling harms. They are there to provide support for all who have been effected by the impact of gambling.

Freephone 24-7 National Gambling Helpline : 08088020133

**Turn2us.org.uk**             <https://www.turn2us.org.uk>

Turn2us is a national charity providing practical help to people who are struggling financially.

**The Edridge Fund**         <http://www.edridgefund.org>

The Edridge Fund is a charity set up by Napo and exists to provide one of grants and support to people who are experiencing hardship or need in Probation Services and Family Courts Section.



To: ..... (Line Manager)

The HSE defines stress as.

*“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”<sup>1</sup>*

I believe my work to be causing stress and having a direct and detrimental impact on my health and wellbeing in the following way(s):

(Please select any appropriate descriptions relating to your experience) ✓

Experiencing chest pain or a faster than normal heartbeat

Experiencing headaches or dizziness

Experiencing muscle tension or pain

Experiencing stomach problems and upsets

Experiencing changes to my menstruation cycle

Affecting my concentration and decisions making processes

Affecting my normal sleep patterns

Affecting my normal diet

Affecting personal relationships

Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worrying about work related issues

Feeling anxious or emotional about attending work

Feeling uncharacteristically irritable and / or impatient

Feeling depressed or lacking

Other: .....

I am therefore requesting that an individual stress risk assessment be carried out as soon as possible, and measures be introduced to address this direct and detrimental impact to my health and wellbeing.

Name: .....

Date: .....

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/what-to-do.htm>